NOTE: The President spoke at 5:35 p.m. at the Bella Center. President Medvedev spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## Statement on the Observance of the Hmong New Year
*December 18, 2009*

Michelle and I extend our warmest wishes to those who are celebrating the Hmong New Year. Over the course of decades, Hmong have come to this country in times of great difficulty, often as refugees escaping persecution. In Southeast Asia, many helped the people of the United States and emigrated here in a period of great strife. Through struggle and sacrifice, they built communities and families and have reminded us of what is best about America. Hmong men and women have come to this country to build a better life, and through their culture and contribution, they have enriched America as well.

The Hmong New Year is traditionally celebrated at the end of the harvest season and marks a time filled with great food, colorful clothes, the music of the *qeej,* and enjoyable games. It is a time for family and community as people gather to bring good luck for the New Year. With that spirit in mind, I wish those celebrating Hmong New Year a prosperous and healthy New Year. *Xyoo tshiab*.

## The President's News Conference in Copenhagen
*December 18, 2009*

*The President.* Let me start with a statement, and then I'll take a couple of questions.

Today we've made meaningful and unprecedented—made a meaningful and unprecedented breakthrough here in Copenhagen. For the first time in history, all major economies have come together to accept their responsibility to take action to confront the threat of climate change.

Now let me first recount what our approach was throughout the year and coming into this conference. To begin with, we've reaffirmed America's commitment to transform our energy economy at home. We've made historic investments in renewable energy that have already put people back to work. We've raised our fuel efficiency standards, and we have renewed American leadership in international climate negotiations.

Most importantly, we remain committed to comprehensive legislation that will create millions of new American jobs, power new industry, and enhance our national security by reducing our dependence on foreign oil.

That effort at home serves as a foundation for our leadership around the world. Because of the actions we're taking, we came here to Copenhagen with an ambitious target to reduce our emissions. We agreed to join an international effort to provide financing to help developing countries, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, adapt to climate change, and we reaffirmed the necessity of listing our national actions and commitments in a transparent way.

And these three components, transparency, mitigation, and finance, form the basis of the common approach that the United States and our partners embraced here in Copenhagen. Throughout the day, we worked with many countries to establish a new consensus around these three points, a consensus that will serve as a foundation for global action to confront the threat of climate change for years to come.

Now, this success would have not been possible without the hard work of many countries and many leaders. And I have to add that because of weather constraints in Washington, I am leaving before the final vote, but we feel confident that we are moving in the direction of a significant accord.

In addition to our close allies who did so much to advance this effort, I worked

throughout the day with Prime Minister Meles of Ethiopia, who was representing Africa, as well as Premier Wen of China, Prime Minister Singh of India, President Lula of Brazil, and President Zuma of South Africa to achieve what I believe will be an important milestone.

Earlier this evening, I had a meeting with the last four leaders I mentioned, from China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, and that's where we agreed to list our national actions and commitments, to provide information on the implementation of these actions through national communications, with international consultations and analysis under clearly defined guidelines. We agreed to set a mitigation target to limit warming to no more than 2 degrees Celsius and, importantly, to take action to meet this objective consistent with science. Taken together, these actions will help us begin to meet our responsibilities to leave our children and our grandchildren a cleaner and safer planet.

Now, this progress did not come easily, and we know that this progress alone is not enough. Going forward, we're going to have to build on the momentum that we've established here in Copenhagen to ensure that international action to significantly reduce emissions is sustained and sufficient over time. We've come a long way, but we have much further to go.

To continue moving forward, we must draw on the effort that allowed us to succeed here today, engagement among nations that represent a baseline of mutual interest and mutual respect. Climate change threatens us all; therefore, we must bridge old divides and build new partnerships to meet this great challenge of our time. That's what we've begun to do here today.

For energy holds out not just the perils of a warming climate, but also the promise of a more peaceful and prosperous tomorrow. If America leads in developing clean energy, we will lead in growing our economy, in putting our people back to work, and in leaving a stronger and more secure country to our children.

And around the world, energy is an issue that demands our leadership. The time has come for us to get off the sidelines and to shape the future that we seek. That's why I came to Copenhagen today, and that's why I'm committed to working in common effort with countries from around the globe. That's also why I believe what we have achieved in Copenhagen will not be the end but rather the beginning, the beginning of a new era of international action.

So with that, let me just take a couple of questions, and I'm going to start with Jeff Mason [Reuters].

*Climate Change Agreement/Emissions Targets*

*Q.* Thank you, Mr. President. Can you give a little bit more detail about how the transparency issue will work, how countries will show or prove that they're doing what they say they'll do on emissions curbs? And can you speak also more specifically about cutting emissions? There's no mention of that in your statement or in what we've heard so far, specifically about the agreement.

*The President.* Well, on the second question first, the way this agreement is structured, each nation will be putting concrete commitments into an appendix to the document, and so will lay out very specifically what each country's intentions are.

Those commitments will then be subject to a international consultation and analysis, similar to, for example, what takes place when the WTO is examining progress or lack of progress that countries are making on various commitments. It will not be legally binding, but what it will do is allow for each country to show to the world what they're doing, and there will be a sense on the part of each country that we're in this together, and we'll know who is meeting and who's not meeting the mutual obligations that have been set forth.

With respect to the emissions targets that are going to be set, we know that they will not be by themselves sufficient to get to where we need to get by 2050. So that's why I say that this is going to be a first step. And there are going to be those who are going to look at the national commitments, tally them up, and say, you know, the science dictates that even more needs to be done. The challenge here was that

for a lot of countries, particularly those emerging countries that are still in different stages of development, this is going to be the first time in which even voluntarily they offered up mitigation targets. And I think that it was important to essentially get that shift in orientation moving. That's what I think will end up being most significant about this accord.

From the perspective of the United States, I've set forth goals that are reflected in legislation that came out of the House, that are being discussed on a bipartisan basis in the Senate. And although we will not be legally bound by anything that took place here today, we will, I think, have reaffirmed our commitment to meet those targets. And we're going to meet those targets, as I said before, not simply because the science demands it, but also because I think it offers us enormous economic opportunity down the road. Okay?

*Climate Change Agreement Monitoring*

*Q.* And the first part of the question was about the transparency issue—[*inaudible*].

*The President.* Well, as I said, there is a specific——

*Q.* The annex.

*The President.* Exactly. There is the annexing combined with a process where, essentially, they are presenting to the world, subject to international consultation and then analysis, exactly what are these steps. So if I make a claim that I'm reducing greenhouse gases because I've changed mileage standards on cars, there will be a process whereby people will be able to take a look and say, is that, in fact, in effect? Okay?

Jennifer Loven [Associated Press].

*Climate Change Agreement*

*Q.* Thank you, sir. You've talked to, in your remarks earlier today, about other nations needing to accept less than perfect in their view. Can you talk about what you gave up and where you might have shifted the U.S. position to get to this point? And also, if this was so hard to get to, just what you have today, how do you feel confident about getting to a legally binding agreement in a year?

*The President.* I think it is going to be very hard, and it's going to take some time. Let me sort of provide the context for what I saw when I arrived.

And I think it's important to be able to stand in the shoes of all the different parties involved here. In some ways, the United States was coming with a somewhat clean slate, because we had been on the sidelines in many of these negotiations over several years.

Essentially, you have a situation where the Kyoto Protocol and some of the subsequent accords called on the developed countries who were signatories to engage in some significant mitigation actions and also to help developing countries. And there were very few, if any, obligations on the part of the developing countries.

Now, in some cases, for countries that are extremely poor, still agrarian and so forth, they're just not significant contributors to greenhouse gases. But what's happened, obviously, since 1992 is that you've got emerging countries like China and India and Brazil that have seen enormous economic growth and industrialization. So we know that moving forward, it's going to be necessary if we're going to meet those targets for some changes to take place among those countries. It's not enough just for the developed countries to make changes. Those countries are going to have to make some changes as well, not at the same pace, not in the same way, but they're going to have to do something to assure that whatever carbon we're taking out of the environment is not just simply dumped in by other parties.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the developing countries like China and India, they're saying to themselves, per capita our carbon footprint remains very small, and we have hundreds of millions of people who don't even have electricity yet, so for us to get bound by a set of legal obligations could potentially curtail our ability to develop, and that's not fair.

So I think that you have a fundamental deadlock in perspectives that were brought to the discussions during the course of this week. And both sides have legitimate points.

My view was that if we could begin to acknowledge that the emerging countries are going to have some responsibilities, but that those

responsibilities are not exactly the same as the developed countries, and if we could set up a financing mechanism to help those countries that are most vulnerable, like Bangladesh, then we would be at least starting to reorient ourselves in a way that allows us to be effective in the future.

But it is still going to require more work and more confidence building and greater trust between emerging countries, the least developed countries, and the developed countries before I think you are going to see another legally binding treaty signed.

I actually think that it's necessary for us, ultimately, to get to such a treaty, and I am supportive of such efforts. But this is a classic example of a situation where if we just waited for that, then we would not make any progress. And in fact, I think there might be such frustration and cynicism that rather than taking one step forward, we ended up taking two steps back.

But I want to be very clear that, ultimately, this issue is going to be dictated by the science, and the science indicates that we're going to have to take more aggressive steps in the future. Our hope is that by investing in clean energy, in research, in development, in innovation, that in the same way that the Clean Air Act ended up spurring all kinds of innovations that solved the acid rain problem at a much cheaper and much more rapid pace than we expected, that by beginning to make progress and getting the wheels of innovation moving, that we are in fact going to be in a position to solve this problem.

But we're going to need technological breakthroughs to get to the goals that we're looking for. In the meantime, we've got to be able to take the steps that are in our grasp right now, like, for example, energy efficiency, something I emphasized last week.

All right. Helene Cooper [New York Times].

*Q.* [*Inaudible*]

*The President.* I'm sorry.

*Climate Change Agreement Compromises*

*Q.* [*Inaudible*]—what about the compromise shift question?

*The President.* I have to say that quietly we did some pretty good groundwork during the course of this year, so that our position was relatively clear. I think that the one principle that I brought to this is that whatever commitments we make, I want to be able to be sure that they're actually commitments that we can keep. So we tried to be modest in what we thought we could accomplish. I think there was interest on the part of some to, for example, increase our mitigation targets. Although when you look out in the years 2025 or 2030, our goals are actually entirely comparable with Europe's. On the front end, they appear to be less, because frankly, they've had a head start over the last several years in doing things like energy efficiency that we care about.

What I said to the other people in the room is, is that I want to make sure that whatever it is that we promise we can actually deliver on and that it would be unrealistic for us to think that we can turn on a dime and that suddenly a clean energy economy is going to emerge overnight, given the fact that it's going to require significant effort. And companies and industries are going to be wanting to make changes; we're already seeing those changes, but they haven't all borne fruit yet. And we want to make sure that we're not getting too far ahead of ourselves in terms of targets, even as I understand that the science compels us to move as rapidly as we can.

All right. Helene Cooper.

*Climate Change Agreement Monitoring/Cap and Trade*

*Q.* Thank you. I wanted to ask you about this listing of the appendix—in the appendix.

*The President.* Right.

*Q.* Going forward, do you think that's going to continue to be sufficient, or do you think verification is going to remain a source of friction between the U.S. and China? And also, on cap and trade, are you able to—were you able to assure the leaders here that you'll make this—that a legislative priority next year? Thank you.

*The President.* With respect to the appendix, these countries have set forth, for the first time, some very significant mitigation efforts,

and I want to give them credit for that. I mean, if you look at a country like India, as I said, they've got hundreds of millions of people who don't have electricity, hundreds of millions of people who by any standard are still living in dire poverty. For them even voluntarily to say, we are going to reduce carbon emissions relative to our current ways of doing business by X percent, is an important step. And we applaud them for that.

The problem actually is not going to be verification in the sense that this international consultation and analysis mechanism will actually tell us a lot of what we need to know. And the truth is that we can actually monitor a lot of what takes place through satellite imagery and so forth. So I think we're going to have a pretty good sense of what countries are doing.

What I think that some people are going to legitimately ask is, well, if it's not legally binding, what prevents us from, 10 years from now, looking and saying, you know, everybody fell short of these goals, and there's no consequences to it? My response is that, A, that's why I think we should still drive towards something that is more binding than it is. But that was not achievable at this conference.

The point—and the second point that I'd make is that Kyoto was legally binding and everybody still fell short anyway. And so I think that it's important for us, instead of setting up a bunch of goals that end up just being words on a page and are not met, that we get moving, everybody is taking as aggressive a set of actions as they can; that there is a sense of mutual obligation and information sharing so that people can see who's serious and who's not; that we strive for more binding agreements over time; and that we just keep moving forward. That's been the main goal that I tried to pursue today.

And I think that as people step back, I guarantee you there are going to be a lot of people who immediately say, the science says you got to do X, Y, Z; in the absence of some sort of legal enforcement, it's not going to happen. Well, we don't have international government, and even treaties, as we saw in Kyoto, are only as strong as the countries' commitments to participate.

Because of the differing views between developing countries and developed countries, in terms of future obligations, the most important thing I think we can do at this point—and that we began to accomplish but are not finished with—is to build some trust between the developing and the developed countries to break down some of the logjams that have to do with people looking backwards and saying, well, Kyoto said this, or Bali said that, or you guys need to do something, but we don't need to do something, or—getting out of that mindset and moving towards a position where everybody recognizes we all have to move together. If we start from that position, then I think we're going to be able to make progress in the future.

But this is going to be hard. This is hard within countries; it's going to be even harder between countries. And one of the things that I've felt very strongly about during the course of this year is that hard stuff requires not paralysis, but it requires going ahead and making the best of the situation that you're in at this point and then continually trying to improve and make progress from there. Okay?

Thank you very much everybody. We'll see some of you on the plane.

*Climate Change Agreement*

*Q.* Mr. President, who will sign the agreement? Since you're leaving, who here has the power to sign it?

*The President.* Well, the—we've got our negotiators who are here. I'm not going to be the only leader who, I think, leaves before it's finally presented, but they are empowered to sign off, given at this point that most of the text has been completely worked out.

*Q.* Does it require signing? Is it that kind of agreement?

*The President.* You know, it raises an interesting question as to whether technically there's actually a signature, since, as I said, it's not a legally binding agreement. I don't know what the protocols are. But I do think that this is a commitment that we, as the United States, are making and that we think is very important.

All right. Thanks, guys.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:30 p.m. at the Bella Center. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this news conference.

## The President's Weekly Address
*December 19, 2009*

Over the past few decades, there has been an intense struggle in Washington between the lobbyists for the insurance industry and the interests of the American people over what's been called a patient's bill of rights, a set of rules to protect Americans from some of the worst practices of the health insurance industry, rules to ensure that all Americans are getting the care they need from their doctors and the care they deserve from their insurance companies.

The last time a patient's bill of rights was within reach was roughly a decade ago, and it was supported by Democrats and Republicans alike, from Ted Kennedy to John McCain. It included the right to an appeals process so you could challenge an unfair decision by an insurance company before a third party. It included the right to choose your own doctor. It included the right to access information about what your health insurance plan means for you, and it called for a new level of transparency so that patients would know if their doctor had a conflict of interest when providing services.

Now, this patient's bill of rights never made it into law. It fell victim, again and again, to the same special interest lobbying that has blocked passage of health insurance reform for so many decades. But today, we are being given another chance to make it a reality, because each of these rights, and many more, are incorporated in the health insurance reform bill that recently passed the House of Representatives and in the bill that is currently making its way through the Senate.

Both the House and the Senate bills would make it against the law for insurance companies to deny you coverage on the basis of a preexisting condition or illness. Both would stop insurers from charging exorbitant premiums on the basis of age, health, or gender. Both would prevent insurance companies from dropping your coverage when you get sick, and both would put a limit on how much you have to pay out of pocket for the treatments you need in a year or a lifetime.

Simply put, the protections currently included in both the health insurance reform bill passed by the House and the version currently on the Senate floor would represent the toughest measures we've ever taken to hold the insurance industry accountable. Anyone who says otherwise simply hasn't read the bills. Just open these proposals at random and you'll find on almost any page patient protections that dwarf any of those passed by Congress in at least a decade.

These protections are just one part of a landmark reform that will finally reduce the cost of health care. When it becomes law, families will save on their premiums. Small businesses and Americans who don't get any insurance today through their employers will no longer be forced to pay punishingly high rates to get coverage. This legislation will also strengthen Medicare and extend the life of the program, while saving senior citizens hundreds of dollars a year in prescription costs. And reforms to target waste, inefficiency, and price gouging by the insurance industry will help make this the largest deficit reduction plan in over a decade.

The insurance industry knows all this. That's why they're at it again, using their muscle in Washington to try to block a vote that they know they will lose. They're lobbying; they're running ads; they're spending millions of dollars to kill health insurance reform, just like they've done so many times before. They want to preserve a system that works better for the insurance industry than it does for the American people.

But now, for the first time, there is a clear majority in the Senate that's willing to stand up to the insurance lobby and embrace lasting health insurance reforms that have eluded us for generations. The question is whether the minority that opposes these reforms will